CHAPTER FOUR

Fictional Art: Structure and Context
CHAPTER FOUR

Fictional Art: Structure and Context

Life has stories, but novels have plots and stories.

(Hawthorn 140)

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan’s Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics was published in 1983 as a formalist-structuralist analysis of narratology. Some of its concepts were derived from structuralism and so the discussion on theme, interpretation, reader response and context were excluded from the book. Seymour Chatman’s Story and Discourse, published in 1978, was written in the Aristotelian tradition. Chatman called the “what of a narrative” its story and the “way of a narrative” its discourse (9). Both the works showed the influence of French structuralists such as Roland Barthes, Claude Bremond, Tzvetan Todorov, A. J. Greimas and Gérard Genette.

During the “classical” phase, that is, from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, narratologists were particularly interested in identifying and defining narrative universals and so they did not take into account the worldliness of the text. Their focus was on the signifier and signified in the Saussurean theory. A decade later, David Herman coined the term “postclassical narratology” and first used it in Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis to describe the kind of narratology which emphasised
on historicity and contextuality of modes of narrative representation. Herman stresses the need for extending the focus of narratology from purely structural aspects to issues of narrated content: "In its postclassical phase, research on narrative does not just expose the limits but also exploits the possibilities of the older, structuralist models. In much the same way, postclassical physics does not simply discard classical Newtonian models, but rather rethinks their conceptual underpinnings and reassesses their scope of applicability" (2-3). The postclassical narratologists extended the scope of narratology to include the cognitive and epistemological functions of a narrative, relating the phenomena encountered in narrative to specific cultural, historical, thematic and ideological contexts.

The development of new approaches like Reader Response Criticism, New Historicism, Feminism and Postcolonialism in the 1990s made Rimmon-Kenan realize the importance of promoting a synthesis of structuralist and historical modes in the analysis of narrative fiction. Therefore, she added the chapter "Afterthoughts, Almost Twenty Years Later" in her book *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, published in 2002. In this chapter she reproduces Ansgar Nunning's views on the difference between structuralist and historical modes of narratology (140).

Structuralist narratology is text-oriented and its main focus is on closed systems and static products; historical narratology is context-oriented and its main focus is on open and dynamic processes. Structuralist narratology evades
moral issues and the production of meaning; historical narratology emphasises on ethical issues and dialogic negotiation of meaning. Structuralist narratology is a unified discipline, focusing on universalist features of all narratives; historical narratology is an interdisciplinary project, focusing on particular effects of individual narratives. Structuralist narratology describes binarism and graded scales; historical narratology gives importance to holistic cultural interpretation. In spite of all these differences, structuralist and historical modes of narratology have nourished each other during the past twenty years.

Rimmon-Kenan describes the various types of speech presentation, giving a seven-tier progressive scale ranging from the ‘purely’ diegetic to the ‘purely’ mimetic (110-11) as suggested by Brian McHale in Poetics and Theory of Literature. The seven types of speech presentation are found in Amitav Ghosh’s novels though the sixth and seventh modes are frequently used.

The first mode is “Diegetic Summary,” which is the bare report that a speech act has occurred without any specification of what was said or how it was said, e.g. from River of Smoke: “Neel was sent to investigate and came back to report that they had been posted there to deal with any enquiries and complaints the foreigners might have. Should any foreigner need to have any washing done, he had only to bring it to the tent” (507). Here Neel describes what was happening in the middle of the Maidan without his views colouring the news. But it is shocking news to Seth, who understands that they are kept as prisoners.
The second mode is “Summary, less purely diegetic,” which represents, not merely mentions, to some degree a speech event in that it names the topics of conversation, e.g. from *The Hungry Tide*: “It had happened in the last hour of the storm, she said. He’d been hit by something very big and very heavy, an uprooted stump; it had hit him so hard that she too had been crushed against the trunk of the tree they were sitting on. He’d said Moyna’s name and Tutul’s before the breath faded on his lips” (392).

The third mode is “Indirect Content Paraphrase,” which is a paraphrase of the content of a speech event, ignoring the style or form of the supposed original utterance, e.g. from *The Glass Palace*: “This was what they said: the British had destroyed the fort at Myingan with immaculate precision, using their cannon, without losing a single soldier of their own. The two ministers were competing with each other to keep the royal family under guard. They knew the British would be grateful to whoever handed over the Royal couple; there would be rich rewards” (25).

The fourth mode is “Indirect Discourse, mimetic to some degree,” which creates the illusion of preserving or reproducing aspects of the style of an utterance, above and beyond the mere report of its content, e.g. from *The Shadow Lines*: “When the house was divided, she said, Maya was very little and she didn’t remember the other side at all. Everything’s upside-down over there, I’d tell her; at their meals they start with the sweets and end with the dal, their books go backwards and end at the beginning, they sleep under their beds and eat on the sheets” (125).
The fifth mode is “Free Indirect Discourse,” which is grammatically and mimetically intermediate between indirect and direct discourse, e.g. from *The Hungry Tide*: “But now, how to get the Queen’s consent? She was always complaining about how small the compound was, how cramped, how much like a gaol. What would she say to the prospect of having the entire staff move up from town?” (82).

The sixth mode is “Direct Discourse,” which is a quotation of a monologue or a dialogue. This mode creates the illusion of pure mimesis, e.g. from *The Hungry Tide*: “The difference, Kanai,” Piya said slowly and emphatically, “is that it was what was intended – not by you or me, but by nature, by the earth, by the planet that keeps us all alive. Just suppose we crossed that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves? What’ll be left then? Aren’t we alone in the universe?” (301).

The seventh mode is “Free Direct Discourse,” which is the typical form of first-person interior monologue, e.g. Arjun’s interior monologue in *The Glass Palace*: “How was that possible? Was it because no one had taught them the words? The right language? Perhaps because it might be too dangerous? Or because they weren’t old enough to know? Was this what Alison had meant, about being a weapon in someone else’s hands?” (428).

Interior monologue, which presents a character's thoughts and emotions, is a kind of stream of consciousness. But every stream of consciousness is not an interior monologue. Stream of consciousness is less
ordered than interior monologue. Unlike stream of consciousness, an interior monologue can be integrated into a third-person narrative. Ghosh's use of interior monologue invites comparison with that of William Faulkner in *As I Lay Dying*. Faulkner's novel is powerful and innovative because of the appearance of fifteen narrators, delivering interior monologues with varying degrees of coherence and emotional intensity. The narrative appears fragmentary in *As I Lay Dying*, but the story demonstrates remarkable unity because of the use of interior monologue. There are fifty-nine monologues spoken by fifteen persons, of whom seven are members of the Bundren family and eight are outsiders. For example, Addie expresses her thoughts, claiming that words are often ineffectual: “And so when Cora Tull would tell me I was not a true mother, I would think how words go straight in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other; and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words” (165-66).

Interior monologue is extensively used in Ghosh’s fiction. Ghosh’s novels show the effective handling of interior monologue, supported by images, symbols and metaphors. In *The Hungry Tide*, where Fokir and Piya do not have a common language for communication, Fokir’s actions are perceived and discussed in interior monologue in Piya’s mind. When Fokir provides a shelter for Piya to change her clothes Piya muses about his concern
for her modesty thus: “she was a person to him and not, as it were, a representative of a species, a faceless, tongueless foreigner. But where had this recognition come from? He had probably never met anyone like her before, any more than she had ever met anyone like him” (HT 71).

In Chapter Thirty-Six of The Glass Palace, Arjun’s conflict is revealed through interior monologue:

Would Kishan Singh have done what he had? Allowed himself to make love to Alison; to prey upon her; to betray Dinu, who was both a friend and something more? He didn’t know himself why he’d been driven to do it; why he’d wanted her so much. He’d heard some of the chaps saying that these things came on you in wartime – on the front. But Kishan Singh was on the front too – and it was hard to think of him doing anything like that. Was that part of the difference between being an officer and a jawan – having to impose yourself, enforce your will? (GP 427)

Following Gerard Genette, Rimmon-Kenan states that there are three basic elements of a narrative—histoire or story, recit or text and narration. According to her, story indicates “the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in these events” (3). She explains the difference between story and text: “Whereas ‘story’ is a succession of events, ‘text’ is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling. Put more simply, the text is what we read. In it, the events do not necessarily appear in chronological
order, the characteristics of the participants are dispersed throughout, and all
the items of the narrative content are filtered through some prism or
perspective” (3). Apart from story and text, there is the act or the process of
production, which is called Narration. The author is the agent responsible for
the production of the narrative and for its communication. Of these three
aspects of narrative fiction, the text is the only one directly available to the
reader. The knowledge of the story and of the narration is acquired by the
reader only through the text. The reader reconstructs the story from the actual
arrangement of the text.

The story is the raw material perceived by the reader from the finished
pattern of the text. It is the sequence of fictional events reconstructed by the
reader. This distinction between the story and the text or plot is derived from
Russian Formalists, who used the terms fabula (story) and sjuzet (plot). Fabula
refers to the chronological sequence of events in a narrative; sjuzet is the re-
presentation of those events through narrative techniques. Seymour Chatman
explains this difference as “double chronology,” which constitutes a defining
characteristic of the novel (114). There is an essential difference between the
narration of the events by the writer and the construction of the order of events
by the reader. Being a superb craftsman, Ghosh explores the fabula from
historical perspective and presents the sjuzet effectively through analepsis
(backward movement) and prolepsis (forward movement). The things that
happen in his fiction are presented in a particular order and the telling of what
happens is also done in a particular order. As Jeremy Hawthorn says, the plot
of a novel “may move backwards and forwards in time, instead of proceeding steadily forward in chronological order. If life goes ABCDE, novels often go DEACB” (140). Great novelists always introduce such deviations because of their desire to experiment in literary genre.

There is an essential difference between “fictional content” and “fictional mode” because all fictions are not novels. Jeremy Hawthorn avers that “fictions are not true, but they are not lies” (2). In order to explain this difference, Hawthorn refers to the book Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective written by Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen. Lamarque and Olsen point out that Hitler Diaries, written by Konrad Paul Kujau, an illustrator and forger, who became famous in 1983, is not fiction in the literary sense because the content is false. Therefore, the structural or semantic properties of sentences alone do not constitute a novel. Fictional art, as Lamarque and Olsen observe, depends on “the conditions under which they are uttered, the attitudes they invoke, and the role that they play in social interactions” (qtd. in Hawthorn 32). Fictional art, in spite of its imaginative quality, is produced as per some fundamental rules. Hawthorn argues that fiction needs a convention with institutional resources.

The movement of parallel plots, which is an integral component of The Shadow Lines, facilitates a movement not only across borders but also into the lives of various characters. Sarbojit Biswas observes: “The concept of distance merges in the unique movement through geographical borders and cities like Dhaka, Calcutta and London as also through the mind forged boundaries that
divide human beings. Such is the pace that the past, the present and the future merge and mingle to form a unique wholesome canvas which has no point of axis” (116). The movement of parallel plots in The Shadow Lines is complex because at the superficial level it becomes a bildungsroman, describing the growth of the narrator’s personality, but at the deeper level it unfolds Tridib’s story, focusing on the title of the novel. Ghosh provides the link between the two stories through the method of doubling in characterization, e.g., the narrator and Tridib, the narrator and Ila, the narrator and Nick, Tridib and Robi, Tha’mma and Mayadebi, Tha’mma and Ila, Tha’mma and Mrs. Price. The movement of parallel plots depends on the treatment of time in The Shadow Lines. While the sjuzet of the novel gives the sequence of events as per the narration with analepsis and prolepsis, the fabula provides the chronological order of events constructed by the reader.

The movement of parallel plots is one of the conventional modes of narration in Ghosh’s fiction. For example, in The Calcutta Chromosome three connected story lines are taking place in three distinct time settings. One narrative is about Ronald Ross’s research on malaria and the super human powers of Mangala and Laakhan. Another narrative is about Murugan who tries to detect a mystery behind the malarial research. The third narrative deals with an Egyptian computer clerk Antar working day and night all alone on his super intelligent computer named Ava and trying to find out what happened to Murugan, who had mysteriously disappeared during his adventure.
The Calcutta Chromosome is divided into two parts. The title of the first part is “August, 20: Mosquito Day” and that of the second is “The Day After.” The novel tells two stories, one belonging to the past and the other happening in the present. The story of the past unfolds how Ross discovered the deadly female mosquito on 20th August 1897 and also describes Murugan’s search of the enigmatic Calcutta Chromosome. The present portrays Antar’s search for Murugan. The narrative covers over a hundred years through analepsis and prolepsis. Shubha Tiwari comments on the strategy employed in The Calcutta Chromosome: “Interestingly Ghosh deconstructs and dismantles Western sense of superiority by Indian irrationality. These beliefs are said to have no scientific basis, yet their strong presence in India can easily be felt. Deconstruction, in the Derridian context is a nihilistic activity. And yet to perform this nihilistic activity Ghosh uses the tool of blind religious beliefs. This is indeed an interesting contradiction of this book” (58). Ghosh mixes the mythical past with all its superstitions and the scientific present with its rationality successfully through the movement of parallel plots.

In River of Smoke, the story of the Parsi merchant Bahram and the letters of the gay Eurasian painter Robin Chimney constitute parallel plots. Shashi Tharoor aptly says: “River of Smoke reads like a cross between Gone with the Wind and a Victorian epistolary novel” (Web). Historical characters like Napoleon and Lin Xexu blend seamlessly with imagined characters like Bahram and Seth. While the main plot, consisting of characters like Bahram, Neel, Seth, Chi-mei, Ah Fat and the members of Canton Chamber of
Commerce, describes opium trade, the sub-plot reveals the culture of Canton through the letters of Robin Chinnery and Paulette's expedition to track down the mythical golden camellia.

In his description of characters, Ghosh presents both sides of the argument regarding the opium trade. He never performs explicit moralising. Davis Robson aptly says: "The cynical pursuit of self-interest by the British who, when not organising cricket matches or lavish banquets, are making vast profits out of drug-trafficking, places the novel squarely in the anti-colonial tradition. But Ghosh is too intelligent a writer to get on his moral high horse. His novel is not a rant, but a panoramic history, rich in period detail and peopled with plausible characters" (Web). The parallel plots complement each other by focusing on the multicultural social setting in the nineteenth century Canton.

Ghosh uses coincidence as a tool to connect the different stories spread in different directions in a novel. For example, in _The Glass Palace_, the necessity of connecting three generations and several families demands Ghosh to use coincidence as a device. Coincidences are synchronous events which deviate from Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's idea of causality. Rukmini Bhaya Nair applies Carl Jung's concept of coincidence as "the joker in nature's pack of cards" to explain how the link among the various characters is established in _The Glass Palace_ (169). She argues that "coincidence represents what postmodernists would call an aporia or 'break' in the logic of narration, just as Postcoloniality marks a disjunction from the earlier trajectory of colonialism"
(169). In her opinion, *The Glass Palace* is “not just a thoroughly researched novel, it is a carefully plotted one” (169). The first coincidence is in Chapter XXI, which describes the meeting between Neel, the elder son of Rajkumar and Dolly, and Manju in a film-studio at Tollygunge. When Manju introduces herself as Uma’s niece, Neel shows “slow disbelief, as though he’d forgotten the sound of his own name” (*GP* 268). The coincidence links the family of Dolly and that of her friend Uma.

The second coincidence occurs in Chapter XXXI, which describes the arrival of Manju’s twin brother Arjun at Morningside House, where he meets Dinu, Alison and Saya John. The coincidence here links the three families together. Rukmini Bhaya Nair observes that it is perfect accordance with Aristotle’s concept of the unities of time and place and points out that coincidence serves as an “unexpected regular” (170) in *The Glass Palace*. When Arjun gives up his allegiance to the British and crosses over to the Indian National Army, he finds himself face to face once again with Dinu. Rukmini Bhaya Nair comments: “It stretches one’s credulity to believe that of all the exhausted soldiers of the INA, the one to emerge out of the woods is Arjun and the one confronting him is his old rival in love and war, Dinu . . . Coincidence, the irresistible old trickster of fiction, shamelessly asking for a willing suspension of disbelief from the reader—and getting it!” (170).

If Ghosh uses coincidence to link the three generations in *The Glass Palace*, he introduces the metaphor of weaving in *The Circle of Reason* through the character of Alu, whose love for weaving connects the different stories.
The plot shows a circular pattern, focusing on the title of the novel *The Circle of Reason*. In the first stage Balaram introduces *Life of Pasteur* to Alu with a lot of passion but he does not get adequate response from Alu. When he continues to talk about Pasteur’s courage, tears come out of Alu’s eyes. Later, it is Alu who retrieves the book from fire. The circle finds its completion here. Ghosh mixes the past and the present so that the *sjuzet* keeps floating, going backward and forward.

Coincidence brings most of the major characters in *Sea of Poppies*. The role of coincidence is indicated in the Fourth Chapter of *Sea of Poppies* when Neel writes a letter, welcoming Benjamin Burnham: “Your arrival is indeed a happy coincidence, and it would have pleased my father, the late Raja. . . (SP 81). Coincidence makes all the major characters with their varied levels of stories converge on the Ibis. The first story is that of Deeti, an impoverished, ‘high-caste’ Hindu widow, who is rescued from her husband’s funeral pyre by Kalua, a man who belongs to a socially ‘lower’ class. They come to the Ibis as indentured labourers en route to Mauritius. The second story is that of Zachary Reid, the Ibis’s foreman, who has concealed his mixed race status from his British employers, fearing discrimination and loss of livelihood. The third story is that of Paulette, a runaway orphan French girl escaping from her British foster family and seeking refuge aboard the Ibis. The fourth story is that of Jodu, a Muslim lascar in the ship, whose romantic entanglements with a Hindu girl Munia, forces him to come to the Ibis, and finally the story of Neel
Rattan Halder, a Hindu raja who has become a victim of British colonialism, facing a penal servitude of seven years in Mauritius.

Life on the Ibis is a totally different affair because religion, caste and social status become meaningless here. National boundaries lose their significance and become mere shadow lines. The sea is the only nation for the people on the Ibis. Caste seems to be a part of past life. Both Deeti and Kalua lose their identities, and their names are changed to “Aditty” and “Maddow Colver” mainly because of the faulty hearing of an English pilot. There is even greater irony in the fate of Neel, who is forced to live in a cell with Aafat, an opium addict. The words of Bishu-ji pronounced to Neel form the prolepsis with much thematic connotation: “From now on, you will never be able to escape this Aafat . . . He is all you have, your caste, your family, your friend; neither brother nor wife nor son will ever be as close to you as he will. You will have to make of him what you can; he is your fate, your destiny” (SP 116). In fact, the relationship established between Neel and Aafat on the Ibis as described in Chapter XIV of *Sea of Poppies* continues in *River of Smoke*.

Shashi Tharoor compares Amitav Ghosh with Joseph Conrad and James Clavell, and points out how Ghosh has brought the victim’s of colonialism to the centre: “Ghosh’s ships, with his fine feel for nautical niceties, sail in Joseph Conrad territory, through waters since romanticised by the likes of James Clavell, but whereas those writers, and so many others, placed the white man at the centre of their narratives, Ghosh relegates his
colonists to the margins of his story, giving pride of place to the neglected
subjects of the imperial enterprise” (Web).

Language variation is an important technique in Ghosh’s novels, especially in the first and second books of the Ibis trilogy—Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke. Ghosh’s use of the English language differs from the language used by writers like V. S. Naipaul and Arun Joshi, who try to preserve the purity of language. Ghosh’s method is the fusion of English with other languages like Hindi, Urdu and Bengali. His approach is similar to that of Salman Rushdie. Both the writers introduce words from the dictionaries and lexicons of the colonial era. For both Rushdie and Ghosh, Sir Henry Yule’s Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, published in 1886, is an important source. This is the reason why there are constructions like “Jodu had taught himself to recognize the officers’ hookums to the point where he could say them aloud, even if only to himself—‘Starboard watch ahoy!’ Jamna pori upar ao!” (SP 104). By introducing this kind of language, Ghosh attempts to provide a glimpse of the motley tongue spoken nowhere but on the water, “whose words are as varied as the port’s traffic, an anarchic medley of Portuguese calaluzes and Kerala pattimars, Arab booms and Bengal paunch-ways, Malay proas and Tamil catamarans, Hindustani pulwars and English snows” (SP 104). Words like “jahaz-bhais” and “jahaz-bahens” indicate a different dialect, which is not a separate language but a variation of language. In Sea of Poppies, language variation increases as the narration progresses.
Language variation imparts local colour and period authenticity to the *sjuzet* of *Sea of Poppies*. The people on the Ibis constitute a mixed group belonging to different strata of society. The lascars on the Ibis have come from different places. They have nothing in common except the Indian Ocean. Among them are Chinese, East Africans, Arabs, Bengalis, Goans, Tamils and Arakanese. When Zachary talks to Serang Ali for the first time, he is startled because he cannot understand the language spoken by Serang Ali: “Chinchin Malum Zikri! You catchi chow-chow? Wat dam’ t’ing hab got inside?” (SP 16). Zachary asks Serang Ali where he has learnt that language. Serang Ali replies: “Afeem ship. Chins-side, Yankee gen’l’um allo tim tok so-fashion. Also Mich’man like Malum Zikri” (SP 16). A week later Serang Ali says to Zachary: “Captin-bugger blongi poo-shoo-foo. He hab got plenty sick! Need one piece dokto. No one chow-chow tiffin. Allo tim do chheechhee, pee-pee. Plenty smelly in Captin cabin” (SP 16). When Zachary protests that they are three hundred miles off course for Port Louis, Serang Ali retorts with impatience: “What for Malum Zikri make big dam bobbery’n so muchee bukbuk and big-big hookuming? Malum Zikri still learn-pijjin. No sabbi ship-pijjin. No can see Serang Ali too muchi smart-bugger inside? Takee ship Por’Lwee-side three days, look-see” (SP 17). Many of the lascars like Serang Ali do not remember anything about their ancestors because they have been separated from their families for a long time. They do not even know which country they originally hail from. Therefore their speech is a strange hybrid of
words and phrases that have been picked up from different places and used over a considerable period of time.

Ghosh talks about his choice of words in *Sea of Poppies* in an interview given to Angiola Codacci:

The Indian Ocean region is an incredibly multilingual area and I wanted to give the reader some idea of this by using different varieties of English. English has been a 'globalized' language for a long time, so it is very rich in dialects and registers and I don’t see any reason why these vast resources should not be put to use. When I was researching *Sea of Poppies*, I looked at a lot of old crew lists, from 19th century ships. These crews were often incredibly diverse, with sailors from East Africa, the Gulf, Somalia, Persia, India and China. It made me wonder how these crewmen, who were all known as ‘lascars’, communicated with each other. One day, while looking through a library catalogue, I came upon a 19th century dictionary of the ‘Laskari’ language. It was fascinating for me personally because it incorporated elements of many of the languages I grew up with. (Web)

Ghosh’s interest in the language of trade used in southern China is evident in *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. In both the novels, he has introduced linguistic interchanges and admixtures.

*River of Smoke* takes variation of language further. The narrative begins in Mauritius and moves to China to describe the life of Indian community
living in Canton, especially “Achha Hong,” a mercantile complex. The word is a combination of the Hindustani “Achha” meaning “all right” and Chinese “Hong” indicating a trading house. The people, who constitute a multilingual society, speak English coloured by Mauritian creole, Cantonese and pidgin, and a variety of Indian languages. Neel speaks Queen’s English while the Gujarati Parsi trader Bahram speaks fluent pidgin and approximate English. Workers like Allow speak the kind of English which is understood by most of the natives and foreigners in Canton. For example, Allow says to Bahram that he has not sent any girl to him and adds that he has got that feeling because of his first experience of swimming in the river of smoke: “Mister Barry too muchi happy Allow have sent this-piece sing-song girlie. Mister Barry only wanchi know: she blongi who? Name blongi what? Mister Barry wanchi give cumshaw” (RS 302).

The different culinary items are described thus: “Everything was cooked in reassuringly familiar ways, with real masalas and recognizable oils, and the rice was never outlandishly soft or sticky: there was usually a biryani or a fish pulao, some daals, some green bhaajis, and a chicken curry and tawa-fried fish” (RS 303). The different components of dress are given in a mixed language: “Bahram chose a knee-length white jama of Dacca cotton; it was discreetly ornamented with white jamdani brocade, and the neck and cuffs were lined with bands of green silk. Instead of pairing this with the usual salwar or pajamas, Bahram settled on a pair of black Acehnese leggings, shot through with silver thread” (RS 216).
Ghosh's method of mixing Indian words and English may create difficulty for the reader but it imparts authenticity to the narrative. Christopher Rollason points out that River of Smoke not only sends out a challenge to complacently Anglocentric notions of English as a global language but also offers a foretaste of possible mutations to linguistic power-structures: "River of Smoke may be seen as a particularly significant instance of the Indian English novel mutating from the postcolonial into the global. In the present geopolitical context, it is especially worthy of note that Ghosh in his new novel employs an English modified under Chinese as well as Indian influence" (14).

Ghosh’s intention to modify the English language is made clear in the first four paragraphs of River of Smoke, where the readers are expected to find the meaning of words such as “pus-pus,” “palki,” “paltan,” “bonoys,” “belsers,” “bowjis,” “salas,” “sakubays,” “bandobast” and “gardmanzes” (RS 3). The novel shows Ghosh’s exploration of communication across linguistic and cultural contours.

In River of Smoke, Ghosh frequently uses words like “linkisters,” “cumshaw,” “girmitiyas,” “mudlarking,” “girlie,” “blongi” and “wanchi” so as to make them part of the vocabulary of the reader. He also modifies the spelling of Hindi and Bengali words and incorporates them into English, e.g., chitty (chithi / letter), dawk (daak / postbox), chawbuck (chabuk / whip), pollock swag (paalak saag / spinach dishes), shishmull (sheesh mahal / mirror palace), and zubben (zubban / tongue). As Nandini Nair says, “Ghosh revels in words like a child frolicking in the snow. He marvels at their shape, throws
them in the air, tastes them on his tongue and sculpts them into different forms” (Web). She compares Ghosh with Neel, one of the characters in both Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke and says: “Ghosh believes he shares similarities with Neel, as together they ponder over the ‘kismat of words.’ In The Ibis Chrestomathy, which Neel pens late into the night, he tracks the fate of words that have sailed from the east and have been naturalised into English. Ghosh explains, ‘Neel is someone who I know deeply— his love for words, his interest in etymology. We share the same pleasure in discovery.’” (Web)

The varieties of the English language used in River of Smoke may be classified into four categories. The first category emerges from education and social status, e.g., differences in the use of language by Neel, Bahram and Paulette Lambert on the one hand, and by Serang Ali, Baboo Nob Kisson, Allow and Chi-mei on the other hand. Deeti uses her personal idiom of expression, which is a mixture of Bhojpuri and Kreole: “Leve te! We’re not here to goggle at the zoli-vi and spend the day doing patati-patata. Paditu! Chal!” (RS 5). Allow talks to Bahram in the language used in Canton: “No have sent girlie. Mister Barry have look-see dream. Mister Barry sleepee allo time, after pipe to Jackass Point” (RS 302). The second category is based on the region to which the characters belong, e.g., Bihar, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Mauritius and London. The third category is decided by the attitude of the speaker. The fourth category depends on the subject matter.

In his review published in the Financial Times on 24th June 2011, Chris Patten comments: “Ghosh’s tale sags for a moment under the weight of his
own scholarship. This is particularly true of the author’s somewhat self-indulgent use of the period pidgin, creole and patois slang that he has studied” (Web). He feels that descriptions like “George Chinnery’s household was as chuck-muck as any in the city, with paltans of nokar-logue doing chukkers in the hallways and syces swarming in the istabbuls” will be incomprehensible to the reader without a proper lexicon. Nevertheless, Amitav Ghosh avers that words gain their significance only in their context: “I just put in the stuff that interests me. In a sense, the world I’m writing about doesn’t exist anymore. I have to assemble it brick by brick. When you write fiction, you have to persuade your readers that this place existed in the sounds and smells. That can’t be done by only staging the plot” (qtd. in Nandini Nair - Web).

Claudia Hyles considers *River of Smoke* “a lavish linguistic salmagundi” and states that Ghosh paints brilliant pictures of landscape and interiors, costume, customs, plants, food and art: “Whether listing the courses in extraordinary Chinese or Macanese banquets, describing the perfumed wisteria pavilion at a plant nursery or detailing the scene inside the atelier of a famous Cantonese painter, his vivid, often humorous prose transports the reader to salivating over the food, inhaling imagined scents or sighing at fascinating scenes” (Web). In *River of Smoke*, there are minute descriptions of the nineteenth century regional cuisine, e.g., the preparation of Xinjiang samsa, which is a small triangle of pastry, stuffed usually with minced meat, very much similar to the Indian samosa. There is also a reference to the fact that the Chinese who eat insects and snakes cannot stand milk in their tea.
Tessa Hadley says, the novel's strength lies in "how thoroughly Ghosh fills out his research with his novelistic fantasy, seduced by each new situation that presents itself and each new character, so that at their best the scenes read with a sensual freshness as if they were happening now" (Web). The sheer accumulation of facts pertaining to the nineteenth century Canton makes River of Smoke a panoramic history.

The historical sweep of River of Smoke invites comparison with Vikram Chandra's epic novel Sacred Games, which has Bombay as its locale. Over 900 pages long, Sacred Games is a magnificent story of friendship and betrayal, of terrible violence, and of the meaninglessness of success in the materialistic world. It is an exploration of the Indian psyche at the close of the millennium. Vikram Chandra freely mixes Indian terms with English as in the narrator's description in the Sartaj sections of Sacred Games. The Hindi words—matka, thali, gulal, and shamshan— are used unitalicised, not marked out as foreign. The essential similarity between River of Smoke and Sacred Games is the fusion of English and Indian idioms. Both the novels deviate from the purity of Standard English in order to provide period authenticity to the sjuzet. Both have brilliant exterior descriptions and interior monologues.

Another important aspect of Ghosh's fiction which deserves special analysis is his art of characterisation. In Morphology of the Folktale, Vladimir Propp classifies the characters in a story in terms of their functions as hero, villain, helper, donor or provider, false hero and others (79-80). Here the term "function" indicates an important action performed by a character which
effects the unfolding of the story. Vladimir Propp observes: “Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action” (21). Propp also points out the functions of characters “serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled” (21). Functions constitute the fundamental components of a tale. But the function of the character is understood by the reader through character-indicators.

According to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, there are two basic types of textual indicators of characters: direct definition and indirect presentation. While direct definition names the trait by an adjective or a noun or some other parts of speech, indirect representation does not mention the trait but displays and exemplifies it in various ways, leaving it to the imagination of the reader. Direct definition, which is akin to generalization, is explicit and so “its dominance in the text tends to produce an authoritative and static impression” (Rimmon-Kenan 60). For example, in The Shadow Lines, the character of the Saheb is presented through direct definition: “He was tall and slim, with a long regular face, a sweeping nose, lustrous, melancholy eyes, and a lot of straight hair that was greying discreetly at the sides, like gunmetal in a frost. Wherever he went heads turned towards him like spotlights following a model (38). Tha’mma’s character is also presented through direct definition: “But my grandmother on the other hand had never pretended to have much of family feeling; she had always founded her morality, schoolmistress-like, in larger and more abstract entities.
On the whole, for all but a few exceptions, she was extremely wary of her relatives; to her they represented an imprisoning wall of suspicion and obligations" (SL 143). In *The Hungry Tide*, Nirmal and Nilima are presented through direct definition in the thirteenth chapter entitled "Nirmal and Nilima." But Fokir's character is presented through indirect representation though the tenth chapter has the title "Fokir."

Indirect representation, according to Rimmon-Kenan, displays and exemplifies a trait through Action, Speech, External Appearance and Environment (61-67). In the novels of Amitav Ghosh, character traits are presented mainly through indirect representation. In *The Shadow Lines*, Tridib's character emerges through action, especially at the end of the novel. Dolly's character in *The Glass Palace* becomes effective due to indirect representation. Speech and environment also contribute in this process. Suffering brings a kind of serenity and wisdom to Dolly, who never hesitates to help others whenever need arises. When Manju is confined to bed, it is Dolly who becomes her nurse, bringing her food and helping with her clothes. Dolly's character is elevated to a higher level when she enunciates a discourse by the Buddha, addressed to his son Rahula:

> Develop a state of mind like the earth, for on the earth all manner of things are thrown, clean and unclean, dung and urine, spittle, pus and blood, and the earth is not troubled or repelled or disgusted. Develop a sense of mind like water, for in the water many things are thrown, clean and unclean, and the water is not
troubled or repelled or disgusted. And so too with fire, which burns all things, clean and unclean, and with air, which blows upon them all, and with space, which is nowhere established. (GP 343)

Manju looks at Dolly’s face and she feels that she has never seen anyone with such repose and calmness. Both Dolly and Manju are presented through indirect representation, which stems from the Buddha’s discourse. The remarkable thing is that it ends in paradox. After giving birth to a baby, Manju recalls Dolly’s reading from the Buddha’s first sermon delivered at Sarnath two thousand and five hundred years before: “Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow, contact with the unpleasant is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow” (GP 344). The paradox is that Manju, in the context of Dolly’s reading from the Buddha’s first sermon, feels the world so bright, with the newborn daughter beside her. Yet this feeling is steeped in irony because Manju dies soon. Throughout the novel The Glass Palace, the character of Dolly unfolds through indirect representation.

Ghosh’s art of characterisation effectively portrays the way Dolly attains maturity and wisdom in course of time. Shubha Tiwari avers that Dolly is the personification of the spirit of endurance and acceptance and that her very weakness is her source of strength. According to her, Dolly is a remarkable synthesis of beauty and tolerance: “Dolly is beautiful, even more beautiful than the princesses that she attends. Basically it is this extraordinary beauty
that enforces a sort of depth on her. Not everyone is able to manage beauty, I mean, extraordinary beauty. Beauty attracts. Beauty demands protection. Beauty also demands graceful behaviour, lest it may be marred. Well, Dolly fulfils many prerequisites of beauty if not all” (94).

Speech plays an important role in revealing the character trait. In *River of Smoke*, Lin Zexu’s address to the foreign traders in Canton clearly indicates his determination and will: “I, the Imperial envoy, am from Fujian, on the borders of the sea, and I thoroughly understand all the arts and ingenious devices of you foreigners. I find that you now have many scores of ships anchored at Lintin and other places, in which are several tens of thousands of chests of opium. Your intention is to dispose of them clandestinely. But where will you sell it? This time opium is indeed prohibited and cannot circulate; every man knows that it is a deadly poison” (*RS* 432).

Conversation reveals character trait. As Rimmon-Kenan says, style indicates “origin, dwelling place, social class, or profession” (64). The conversation between Napoleon and Bahram in *River of Smoke* is an example. Napoleon is superior to Bahram in argument because his words not only connect the past and the present but also suggest what is going to happen in future. Bahram defends his position as opium trader: Opium is like the wind or the tides: it is outside my power to affect its course. A man is neither good nor evil because he sails his ship upon the wind. It is his conduct towards those around him—his friends, his family, his servants—by which he must be judged. This is the creed I live by” (*RS* 175). Napoleon directs his piercing look
at Bahram and says: "But a man may die, may he not, because he sails upon the wind?" (RS 175). Napoleon’s prophecy, which exposes Bahram’s hypocrisy and his intention of associating the free market with the divine order, becomes true when Bahram dies in the river of smoke.

Ghosh introduces torrential narration in important contexts to augment the effect of storytelling. Novelists like Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Saul Bellow, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth narrate their stories through torrential narration with much articulation. There are several examples in Ghosh’s The Glass Palace, The Hungry Tide, Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke. Here is a description of the tidal wave in The Hungry Tide:

It was as if a city block had suddenly begun to move: the river was like pavement, lying at its feet, while its crest reared high above, dwarfing the tallest trees. It was a tidal wave, sweeping in from the sea; everything in its path disappeared as it came thundering towards them. Piya's mind went blank as disbelief yielded to recognition. Up to this point there had been no time for terror, no time to absorb the reality of the storm and to think about anything other than staying alive. But now it was as if death had announced its approach and there was nothing but to wait for its arrival. (383)

In Sea of Poppies, Kalua’s adventure, which is an extraordinary action, is presented through torrential narration:
Unloosing a roar, he began to whirl the bamboo platform above his head, holding it by the end of its rope. The heavy sharp-edged object became a blur, cracking heads and breaking bones, clearing a path through the crowd—people fled from the hurling projectile, like cattle scattering before some whirling demon. Racing to the mound, Kalua placed the platform against the fire, scrambled to the top, and snatched Deeti from the flames. With her inert body slung over his shoulder, he jumped back to the ground and ran towards the river, dragging the now-smouldering bamboo rectangle behind him, on its rope. On reaching the water, he thrust the platform into the river and placed Deeti upon it. (177)

Ghosh’s panoramic stories with a series of discrete episodes demand torrential narration to highlight the complexity of the situation.

Another important aspect of Ghosh’s fictional art is his handling of myth. As Chinua Achebe describes the Igbo culture and tradition through the presentation of the local myth in *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God*, Ghosh introduces the Bon Bibi myth in *The Hungry Tide*. The settlers in the Sundarbans believe that anyone who enters the watery labyrinth without pure heart will never return home. Though they cannot determine their identity, they have strong faith in deities like Bon Bibi and Shaw Jongali. They are haunted by the fundamental questions such as who and what they are, where did they come from, and why do they live there, yet they are united by their belief that they are protected by Bon Bibi. They perform *The Glory of Bon Bibi*
on a grand stage erected on the open expanse of Lusibari’s maidan. Hundreds
of people attend the show night after night. Kanai is surprised to note that
unlike the familiar mythological tales, the tiger-goddess does not come from
heaven but from Arabia. The settlers consider the Gangetic dolphins Bon
Bibi’s messengers. During the visit to the island of Garjontola, Fokir tells
Kanai about his mother’s belief that the person who is pure in heart need not
fear in the island. The episode is a fine example of indirect presentation of the
character traits of both Kanai and Fokir. In the following conversation, Fokir,
in spite of his lack of education, is superior to Kanai because there is no gap
between what he says and how he behaves whereas the same yardstick cannot
be applied to Kanai because of his inclination towards Fokir’s wife Moyna.

‘Are you a clean man, Kanai-babu?’

Kanai sat up startled. ‘What do you mean?’

Fokir shrugged: ‘You know – are you good at heart?’

‘I think so,’ Kanai said. ‘My intentions are good anyway – as for
the rest, who knows?’

‘But don’t you ever want to know for sure?’

‘How can anyone ever know for sure?’

‘My mother used to say that here in Garjontola, Bon Bibi would
show you whatever you wanted to know.’ (HT 323)

The difference between Fokir and Kanai is that while Fokir has strong
faith in his mother’s saying, “No one who is good at heart has anything to fear
in this place,” Kanai cannot experience such purity in heart. In the island of
Garjontola, their positions are suddenly reversed. As Fokir runs on the mud with ease, Kanai becomes completely immobile, being slapped in the face by the wetness of the mud. Education, caste, religion and social status lose their meanings at Garjontola. Kanai represents the townsman who mistrusts the rustic and the city's antagonism to the village. For such mistrust and antagonism, Kanai pays the price when he gets a glimpse of the tiger, which is sitting less than a hundred metres away, watching him with its tawny, flickering eyes. Ghosh's descriptive power is in full flow here: "The upper parts of its coat were of a colour that shone like gold in the sunlight, but its belly was dark and caked with mud. It was immense, of a size greater than he could have imagined, and the only parts of its body that were moving were its eyes and the tip of its tail" (HT 329). Kanai's fate is that he is to be rescued by Fokir, the same rustic whom he called "the son of a pig" a moment ago.

The terror evoked in Kanai when he looks at the tiger is a kind of Reichian concept identified in Saul Bellow's novel Henderson the Rain King. Reich, an Austrian psycho-analyst, developed modern therapy techniques and helped elucidate character structure. Promoting the concept of "character armour" as a type of defence mechanism, Reich emphasized the necessity of initially breaking down the "character armour" that a patient had constructed to defend himself from anxieties, but later he found that the "character armour" had its muscular components.

Henderson's experience with Atti, the lioness, is based on the method recommended by Reich. Dahfu, the King of the Wariri, takes Henderson to
the underground, makes him look through the grating at the lioness Atti, and
talks about the inevitability of death. Henderson watches the face of the lioness
coming towards the king and how she allows him to fondle her. Inside the
den, everything is black and amber. The stone walls themselves are yellowish.
The dust is sulphur-coloured. The eyes of the lioness are ringed absolutely with
black. Lying in the dust, Henderson roars while Dahfu sits with his arm about
the lioness. Dahfu insists that Henderson must try to make more of a lion of
himself.

A comparative study of Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* and Saul Bellow’s
*Henderson the Rain King* shows that both the novelists have used the Reichian
theory as technique to highlight the effect of fear on human consciousness. As
Fokir teaches Kanai by exposing him to the tiger and the perilous quality of
Nature in the island of Garjontola, Dahfu teaches Henderson in the lion’s den
how to face death, how to “be” and how to “love.” Both the novels focus on
the truth that when fear subsides, one is capable of admiring beauty. In *The
Hungry Tide*, Kanai is not able to break from the suction effect of the mud till
he sees the tiger. By using interior monologue, Ghosh effectively portrays what
is going on in Kanai’s mind, which is filled with the visions of the ways in
which the tide country brings death to human beings. In *Henderson the Rain*, a
similar lesson is taught to Henderson by Dahfu. Henderson settles on his knees
and roars like a lion. Dahfu instructs Henderson to feel the lion: “Now you are
a lion. Mentally conceive of the environment. The sky, the sun, and creatures
of the bush. You are related to all. The very gnats are your cousins. The sky is
your thoughts. The leaves are your insurance, and you need no other. There is no interruption all night to the speech of the stars . . . Be the beast! You will recover humanity later, but for the moment, be it utterly" (266 - 67).

At this point, Henderson understands the prophecy of Daniel. Ihab Hassan comments on the significance of Henderson's experience in the lion's den: "It is not merely by journeying to Africa, with its strange kings and primitive rituals, that Henderson begins to attain the wisdom. It is rather by learning how to absorb the pure moment which brings together the currents of life and death, ecstasy and numbness, absorb an animal presence, that he perceives the limits of human strife" (319-20). Ihab Hassan's comment is applicable to *The Hungry Tide* also. The encounter with death helps both Henderson and Kanai get a different perception of human existence.

The landscape of the tide country in *The Hungry Tide* symbolises the conflict between human efforts to establish artificial boundaries and nature's intention to erase those boundaries. The islands in the tide country are reshaped every day. When the tides create a new land, mangroves begin to gestate. Ghosh employs several images and metaphors to describe the islands which are "the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the áchol that follows her, half-wetted by the sea. They number in the thousands, these islands; some are immense and some no larger than sandbars; some have lasted through recorded history while others were washed into being just a year or two ago" (*HT* 7). A mangrove forest is "a universe unto itself," different from other woodlands or jungles. The very structure of the
terrain is hostile to human beings and every year dozens of people die in their attempt to enter the forest. The irony is that this archipelago is called “the Sundarban,” which means “the beautiful forest.”

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh uses water as the agent that rewrites the social matrix of the Sundarbans in the novel. Water serves as motif and agent, shaping not only the story but also the geography of the land. It is also significant that Ghosh uses water as the agent to resolve the chief conflict described in the novel. Divya Anand of La Trobe University, Australia, explains how Ghosh uses water as a recurring motif from three angles:

First, water, as the agent of change, provides Ghosh a way to steer clear of taking a moral or ideological stand while addressing the complex struggle between humans and animals for survival. Second, the motif of water makes it possible to objectively and dispassionately highlight the plight of both the dispossessed people and the threatened wildlife. Third, by using water as an element to undermine the hegemonic social order, Ghosh is able to keep the focus on the conflict, rather than on the resolution, making the novel itself and indeed its primary trope, water, the agents of political and social change. (23)

Divya Anand points out that water, as both a symbolic and a literal phenomenon, serves heuristically to expose the eco-social and eco-political issues that the novel addresses as it dramatizes the competing claims of human and non-human species for existence.
Mythology is a powerful tool for psychology because it reveals the function of the collective unconscious. It facilitates the understanding of a culture deeply and makes the appreciation of its mythos, stories and dreams possible. In fact, many of the symbols which occur in dreams are culture specific and depend on mythic stories. Myths of origin, folk tales, dynastic stories and historical details of the life of ordinary people provide access to the core of a culture and time. In *The Hungry Tide*, the Bon Bibi myth and folklore are used to highlight the lifestyle and belief of the settlers in the tide country. Ghosh's use of the local myth produces the effect of circularity in *The Hungry Tide*, deviating from linear pattern. Mythology and geology contribute to the theme of *The Hungry Tide*, providing an alternative narrative to the recorded history.

The mythical background of *The Calcutta Chromosome* questions the belief that liberation of humanity is possible only through scientific knowledge and suggests the existence of alternative possibilities. Tarun J. Tejpal comments on Ghosh's fusion of science and myth in *The Calcutta Chromosome*:

Ghosh conjures and records the voice of high reason and inscrutable unreason with similar equipoise of tone and style, thus paying tribute, even as he's ensconced in New York, to the occult Indian self. This book is an amazing amalgam of many things, a very impressive display of scholarship, narrative skills, and complex plotting. In the strange eeriness of its tone it is reminiscent of another contemporary master, Paul Auster. In this
book, in the manner of Auster but with greater range, Ghosh achieves a peculiarly haunting quality. The book's pleasures lie not in the answers to its mysteries, but in the mysteries themselves. (Web)

Ghosh's technique of mixing what actually happened in the past with all its myths, beliefs and superstitions, and what exists in the worldwide electronic archive, makes *The Calcutta Chromosome* a historical novel that uses science fiction to refigure the possibility of cultural history.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh employs the technique of magic realism by juxtaposing the elements of fantasy with reality to portray the function of the supernatural machinery and mystery along with the real incidents. For example, when the young Phulboni goes to Renupur, he witnesses the supernatural power of ghosts and phantoms. It was only after a hard struggle for life that he saves himself from getting killed twice by train. The novel resembles a suspense thriller, depicting the unusual appearance of mysterious things like the lantern, rail siding, ghost station-master, ghost train and the one whose face is wrapped in darkness: "... he heard a scream, a raging, inhuman howl that tore through the stormy night. It hurled a single word into the wind—'Lakhan' and then it was silenced by the thunder of the speeding train" (*CC 227*). The interpretation of the Lakhan stories later reveals the facts about the medical mystery and becomes the culmination of the novel. It also shows how the Lakhan figure had been active in the preservation of the "Calcutta chromosome," and focuses on Phulboni’s own involvement with the
Spiritualist program at the time of Murugan's disappearance. The names—Lakhan, Lutchuman, Laxman, Lachman and Lucky—refer to the same person but in different contexts and times.

Ghosh portrays the religious rituals performed by Mangala for transmigration of soul by using the technique of fantastical realism in the narrative, highlighting the mystical and supernatural phenomena. For instance, Sonali, who works at the Calcutta magazine, becomes the eyewitness of the same ceremony in Robinson Street, where Laakhan's spirit is transferred into the body of Romen Haldar and the entire ceremony is performed by Mangala in the form of Mrs. Aratounian: "She caught a glimpse of the tops of dozens of heads, some male, some female, young and old, packed in close together. Their faces were obscured by the smoke and flickering fire light . . . A figure had come out of the shadows: it was a woman . . . She seated herself by the fire and placed the bag and the birdcage beside her. The drumming rose to a crescendo: there was a flash of bright metal and a necklace of blood flew up and fell sizzling on the fire" (CC 138-40). Murugan finds out in 1995 an esoteric cult of image worship in Calcutta and identifies that the image is that of Mangala. She is called Mangala-bibi and people offer puja to commemorate her reincarnation. The incidents of the past are presented in the novel from anthropological and psychological perspectives.

Images and symbols play an important role in Ghosh's novels. While images are associated with concrete qualities rather than abstract meanings, symbols represent something other than what is conveyed at the superficial
level. For example, in *The Shadow Lines*, Tha’mma’s ancestral home symbolises the meaninglessness of establishing boundaries, which destroy the tradition and culture between two entities. Tha’mma describes the house in Dhaka, where she and Mayadebi, her father's elder brother Jethamoshai and his family, her parents and grandparents were brought up as one big joint family: "It was a very odd house. It had evolved slowly, growing like a honeycomb, with every generation of Boses adding layers and extensions, until it was like a huge, lop-sided step-pyramid, inhabited by so many branches of the family that even the most knowledgeable amongst them had become a little confused about their relationships" (*SL* 133).

The house in Dhaka symbolises unity and cohesiveness. Tha’mma recalls how she and Mayadei used to recite their alphabets, Bengali first and then English, and how their grandfather would rap them on the knuckles every time they committed a mistake. Those were happy days for her and Mayadebi. After her grandfather’s death, the discipline could not be maintained by Jethamoshai. She says: “But although he looked every bit as stern as his father, he had had an odd trick of blowing through his lips, exactly like a tired tonga-horse, when he was listening. So, often, either she or Mayadebi would burst into laughter, halfway through their recitation” (*SL* 121-22). The narration here unfolds an image, which brings out the contrast between the past with its happy memories and the present with its alienation.
The following passage from *The Shadow Lines* questions the meaning of doors and the necessity of constructing a veranda, describes a staircase that is flat, and an imaginary baby Magda:

That's the staircase, she said. You have to climb up it and you come to the bedrooms.

She drew another set of lines, right next to the staircase.

I shook my head violently; something about those lines had begun to disturb me.

You're lying, I shouted at her. That can't be a staircase because it's flat, and staircases go up, they aren't flat. And that can't be upstairs because upstairs had to be above and that isn't above.

You're stupid, she said. Don't you understand? I've just rearranged things a little. If we pretend it's a house, it'll be a house. We can choose to build a house wherever we like. (*SL 77*)

The narrator feels that a nice house must also have a veranda. The house he looks at does not have a veranda and therefore it is not a house.

As the poet in Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" questions the necessity of constructing walls where they do not serve any purpose, Tha’mma describes in a sorrowful mood what happened when the members of the family decided to divide the house. When the wall was built, it went through a couple of doorways blocking the passage; it had also gone through a lavatory bisecting an old commode; even the father's old nameplate was divided into two by the sons; it
was divided in the middle by a thin white line, and their names were inscribed on the two halves and the result was that nobody could read them. Tha’mma points out the negative aspects of partition: “They had all longed for the house to be divided when the quarrels were at their worst, but once it had actually happened and each family had moved into their own part of it, instead of the peace they had so much looked forward to, they found that a strange, eerie silence had descended on the house” (SL 123). Tha’mma feels that it was never the same again because “the life went out of it” (SL 123). Every partition produces this effect. The house resembles India with its vast entity built up by different generations, emphasising on the diversity of cultures.

When John Hawley asks about the influence of Marcel Proust, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Ford Madox Ford, Ghosh replies that his ambition was to present space as Proust had done with time and admits that Proust’s influence on The Shadow Lines is clearly evident in the structure of its sentences:

The narrative structure of Ford Madox Ford’s The Good Soldier made a huge impression on me when I first read it, in my teens. My interest in Proust was born when I found out, many years later, that Madox Ford had been influenced by Remembrance of Things Past. However, I did not read Remembrance of Things Past until 1985, after I’d written my first novel The Circle of Reason. This was about the time that was starting my second novel, The Shadow Lines and Proust certainly had a great impact on the book.
I think in retrospect that one of the reasons why Proust made such an impression was that his work seemed to me to represent an alternative modernism. (8)

Ghosh admits that Proust's influence on *The Shadow Lines* is clearly evident in three aspects. The first is in the structure of its sentences. The second is in the unnaming of the narrator. The last is in the handling of time and space in the narrative of *The Shadow Lines*.

In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh portrays the ups and downs of human life by introducing the name "Glass Palace" as the luxurious abode of the Royal Family of Burma at the beginning of the novel and an ordinary photo studio of Dinu at the end. The Glass Palace functions as a powerful symbol with several connotations. King Thebaw's Glass Palace was situated at the exact centre of Mandalay, deep within the walled city with a sprawling complex of pavilions, gardens and corridors. It was a glorious emblem of the country's power because "the Kings of Burma," as Queen Supayalat says, "were not Princes, they were sovereigns, they'd defeated the Emperor of China, conquered Thailand, Assam, Manipur" (*GP* 22).

The Glass Palace stood for the wealth and elegance of the Royal Family of Burma. It consisted of walls of shining crystal and mirrored ceiling, which was shimmering with sparks of golden light when the lamps were lit. But the arrival of the British changed everything in the Glass Palace. The end of the novel mentions the Glass Palace on two occasions—the first is the research work of a group of young scholars attempting to write a dissertation on the
nineteenth century history of Burma called *The Glass Palace Chronicles*, and the second is a modest photo studio where young people assemble to discuss the issues pertaining to the dictatorship of twentieth century Burmese political leadership.

Rajkumar, one of the major characters in *The Glass Palace*, is a symbol of the forced diaspora, rising to success on account of their perseverance. When he arrives at Ratnagiri, Uma receives a letter from her uncle D. P. Roy, who lives in Burma. Roy in his letter has made a request to Uma to persuade her husband, who is the Collector of Ratnagiri, to grant permission to Rajkumar to meet King Thebaw. Roy refers to Rajkumar as a successful businessman who has risen to eminence from utter poverty, having only “a bundle of clothes and a tin box” (*GP* 135). Roy further states that at the age of thirty, even before having time to marry, Raj Kumar has become one of the richest people in Rangoon. Shubha Tiwari aptly comments: “Raj Kumar is an individual here as well as a representative, a symbol of a whole migrated community. His fate and rise have been linked to that of his community and what we get in a wonderful individual picturization as well as functioning of an entire group of people in an alien land. This is what I call flashes of genius on part of the author” (93).

In *Sea of Poppies*, the Ibis symbolises diversity in unity. The characters are just as diverse as the British Empire itself, each with their own dialects and idiosyncrasies. They undertake a voyage which becomes a metaphor of one-way process. The voyage irrevocably transforms them into a different life,
inverting their identities. Deeti and Kalua are examples. The Ibis has an important role to play in their lives. Baboo Nob Kissin, one of the passengers, aptly calls the Ibis a vehicle of transformation, travelling through the mists of illusion towards the elusive, ever-receding landfall that was Truth.

At the beginning of the novel, Deeti she envisions the Ibis as a ship like a great bird, with sails like wings and a long beak. Though she has never before seen such a ship in her life, she feels that it has come for her. At the end of the novel, she lies on the deck of the Ibis, holding a poppy seed between her fingers, and invites her lover to taste it. As Adam Mars-Jones writes in his review “And They Called It Poppy Love,” the process of addiction is “almost metaphysical—there comes a point when only opium can make people forget the damage opium has done” (Web).

Poppy becomes an important symbol in the novel because it serves both as destroyer and as Shelley’s West Wind does. It is evident in the scene in which Neel Halder’s face is tattooed with his crime, the name of the prison and the date. The tattooist takes pity on him and pushes a little ball of opium between his lips to relieve him of pain. The same opium that has destroyed his life provides relief to him. Adam Mars-Jones points out the irony in this particular incident which describes the tattooist’s sympathy for Neel Halder and his act of watering the ink so as to make it disappear after a few months: “This is an exquisite image of the fancied permanence of the marks the British made on India, but it has another aspect. What is ‘written on your forehead’ in traditional Indian terms is your fate, but here fate washes off over time.
In a teasing reversal of cultural stereotypes, it is the British who are the fatalists, trying to condemn others to their own fixity, and it's their colonial victims who make their own destinies" (Web).

Deeti compares the rolling of the child in her womb to the movement of the Ibis. She feels “as if her belly were the sea, and the child a vessel, sailing towards its own destiny” (SP 462). The following conversation between Deeti and Kalua is one of the most remarkable aspects of the novel, which shows the mingling of the past, the present and the future:

Deeti turned to Kalua and whispered: Tonight it's we too are being married again.

Why? said Kalua. Wasn’t the first time good enough? When you found the flowers for the garlands and strung them together with your own hair?

But we didn’t do the seven circles, she answered. There was no wood and no fire.

No fire? he said. But didn't we make our own? (SP 462)

The question “No fire?” has great irony because Deeti was actually standing in the midst of the flames of the funeral pyre during sati when Kalua saved her.

Another important aspect of Ghosh's fiction is its point of view. In a short story, the writer usually maintains the same point of view from beginning to end. But in a novel, the writer may introduce several points of view. For example, in War and Peace, Tolstoy describes the history of Napoleon's invasion of Russia, shifting the point of view in and out of the minds of many
characters. There is a subtle difference between the point of view of the narrator and that of the focalizer.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan states that "the story is presented in the text through the mediation of some 'prism,' 'perspective,' 'angle of vision,' verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his" (72). She feels that the distinction between narration and focalization is a "theoretical necessity" and that the interrelations between "speaking" and "seeing" can be studied effectively only on this basis. Narration and focalization may be different in first person retrospective narratives. As an example, she quotes a passage from Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*:

>'You are to wait here, you boy,' said Estella and disappeared and closed the door.

I took the opportunity of being alone in the courtyard, to look at my coarse hands and my common boots. My opinion of those accessories was not favourable. They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now, as vulgar appendages (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 73).

Though this is a record of things seen by the child, words like "accessories" and "appendages" are not within a child's vocabulary. The narrator here is Pip, the adult, while the focalizer is Pip, the child.

In Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator is also the focalizer, as evident in the following passage:
In 1939, thirteen years before I was born, my father's aunt, Mayadebi, went to England with her husband and her son, Tridib.

It startles me now to discover how readily the name comes off my pen as 'Mayadebi', for I have never spoken of her thus . . . Perhaps it was merely because I knew her very little, for she was not often in Calcutta. That explanation seems likely enough, but I know it to be untrue. The truth is that I did not want to think of her as a relative: to have done that would have diminished her and her family.

My grandmother didn't approve of Tridib. (SL 3)

The narrator expresses his own judgements and feelings here when he is at the present unlike Pip in Great Expectations. His estimate of Tridib's character is different from that of Tha'mma.

Gerald Prince classifies points of view into three types. The first type is the “unrestricted point of view,” by which the novelist focalizes and verbalizes the point of view of any character in the novel. This point of view is called the “omniscient” one because the narrator can move freely and narrate from whatever angle he chooses. Most of the novels of Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence belong to this category. The Circle of Reason, The Calcutta Chromosome, The Glass Palace, Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke are of this kind. The Hungry Tide slightly differs in its narrative technique because it is basically a book about reading a book. The Morichjhapi massacre is narrated by Nirmal
in his notebook while the rest of the action is both distant and contemporary. Most of the story is narrated either through Kanai or Piyali Roy.

The second type of point of view is the “internal point of view.” Gerald Prince says that in such narratives, everything is “presented in terms of the knowledge, feelings, and perceptions of one or several characters” (51). The narrative is given through the perspective of one single character who participates in the action, or through the perspectives of multiple characters who participate in the action, offering different points of view of the same experience. Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* is of this type. The point of view determines the verisimilitude of the story in this novel. K. Ratna Sheila Mani explains how Ghosh has lent an unusual quality to the first person narrative:

> Several early novelists like Defoe, Dickens, Thackeray and Melville have done it as did later ones like Conrad, Fitzgerald, Hemingway and Warren. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* too makes use of a first person narration. However, nowhere in the novel is the name of the ‘I’ narrator revealed. In contrast, we have Melville’s narrator saying “Call me Ishmael,” and the reader is ready to believe what he tells us about Captain Ahab and his Whale. However, the unnamed narrator in *The Shadow Lines* does not affect the reader’s belief, because, despite his anonymity, Ghosh’s narrator is a firmly placed character. (68)
K. Ratna Sheila Mani points out that the narrative voice is distinct in *The Shadow Lines* because the story comes to the reader after being filtered through a singular consciousness.

The third type of point of view is called the “external point of view.” The narrator sees and narrates things strictly from the outside. He does not enter the mind of any character and tells what the characters say, leaving the reader to infer their thoughts and feelings.

In Ghosh’s creative world, there is no clear demarcation between fiction and non-fiction because he always attempts to transcend the boundaries in literary forms. Whether it is historical novel or travel writing, the novelist is in constant dialogue with the historian, complementing each other. Ghosh’s fiction uses history as backdrop to focus on human predicament in myriad dimensions. *The Shadow Lines* is the history of the partition and its consequences; *The Calcutta Chromosome* is the history of malaria research from postcolonial perspective; *In an Antique land* is a subversive history in the form of a traveller’s story; *The Glass Palace* is the history of colonisation and independence of Burma; *The Hungry Tide* is the history of the refugees in the Sundarbans during the Morichjhapi massacre of 1979; *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* deal with the history of the Opium War during the nineteenth century. Thus, in Ghosh’s fiction, content that emerges from history and anthropology, and form that stems out of imagination and language variation, perfectly combine to produce an aesthetic experience which is complex as well as suggestive.